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JAMES A. GARFIELD.

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Memorial Sermon,

BY

REV. ARTHUR MITCHELL, D. D.

JAMES A. GARFIELD.

A

MEMORIAL SERMON

DELIVERED IN THE

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

CLEVELAND, O.,

BY

REV. ARTHUR MITCHELL, D. D.,

ON

Sunday, September 25, 1881.

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CLEVELAND, O., September 26, 1881

REV. ARTHUR MITCHELL, D. D.

DEAR SIR :

The undersigned, impressed with the force and the beauty of your delineation of the life and character of our lamented Garfield, at the morning service in the First Presbyterian Church, Sunday, September 25, and earnestly desiring that a tribute to his goodness, and his greatness so just and truthful should be more widely extended through its publication, respectfully request a copy of the sermon for this purpose.

GEORGE H. ELY.

JAMES F. CLARK.

R. F. SMITH.

GEORGE H. BURT.

AMASA STONE

E. C. HIGBEE.

PETER HITCHCOCK.

JOHN A. FOOTE.

G. E. HERRICK.

GEORGE MYGATT.

SAMUEL WILLIAMSON.

R. C. PARSONS.

HENRY N. RAYMOND.

CLEVELAND, O., September 27, 1881.

GEORGE H. ELY, Esq.

DEAR SIR :

I very gladly accede to the request contained in the note signed by yourself and many other friends. It is a source of great satisfaction to me to know that my heart-felt words respecting President Garfield, on the sad occasion to which you refer, seemed to you, and to his other friends whose names accompany your own, only just. If this is the estimate of his character which you also, his life-long friends and neighbors, hold, then with new and warmer admiration my heart goes out towards that wonderful and beloved man.

Yours, in the common grief,

ARTHUR MITCHELL.

MEMORIAL SERMON

"I will make a man more precious than fine gold ; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir.—Is. xiii: 12.

We share, my friends, to-day the greatest grief that America has ever known. It is no exaggeration to say that no one stroke of Providence has ever spread throughout all our land such poignant and universal pain, or has been so widely felt as a shock and a sorrow in every portion of the earth.

I am not using words without care. I do not forget those dreadful days of April, sixteen years ago, when the slow procession passed from state to state, bearing the remains of the beloved Lincoln to the tomb. But there was one whole section of our land, it will be remembered, which had never acknowledged him as their ruler, and had never viewed him, alas ! except as their foe. Innumerable noble hearts there disowned the crime that laid him low ; but although they abhorred the assassin's crime, around his victim their sentiments of confidence

and admiration and loyalty had never been gathered.

I do not forget the horror which smote the nation when Hamilton fell, the universal pall of sorrow of which our fathers tell us,—the metropolis of the country draped in black, the vast and solemn cor-tege which, amidst weeping throngs, followed Hamilton through its chief avenue to the grave.

And as one heart the hearts of Americans mourned for Washington. There were friends of liberty who wept with them in every part of the world. But liberty itself had not then so many friends on earth as now. By one great nation Washington was held to have drawn a rebel sword. And against another, our earlier ally, he had unsheathed it and stood prepared for war. And even by the countrymen of Washington it could not be forgotten that he had nearly fulfilled the allotted years of man. His work was done. His years of war had won for his country the full liberty she sought. His eight glorious years of Presidential life had organized the Government, established its relations to foreign powers and made its bulwarks strong. At his death it was even said with truth that he had “deliberately dispelled the enchantment of his own great name;” with wonderful unselfishness he himself placed the helm in other hands, looked on for a time at the

prosperity which he had taught others to supply, and "convinced his country that she depended less on him than either her enemies or her friends believed." And then he died in the peaceful retirement of his home. It was the death of a venerated father whose work was done.

A glance at the sorrows of other years only reveals to us anew the greatness of our present loss. It explains the grief which the nation is bearing now, the sympathy which flows to-day to America from every shore.

Our beloved Garfield was the acknowledged President of all the land. Confidence, admiration, goodwill, a new-born loyalty, were turning towards him from those who had been long and deeply estranged from our national life. Even those who had once known him as an enemy had felt the spell of his wonderful history and his great, kind heart. Insensibly to themselves they had begun to admire his courage, to love his gentleness, and to feel a pride of possession in his varied and marvelous powers. That such a ruler should be lost to them and to his country, that a President so just and wise and kind should have met so foul a death has pierced their hearts with pain.

And there are none whose grief is not made more profound when they think that he died in the midst

of his magnificent prime. The question is on every lip throughout the world: When did any man ever ascend to that lofty place more completely fitted for its powers, more variously and richly furnished for a splendid and beneficent career? The pilot had been trained for fifty years. A nation called him to the helm. The voyage was all before him. But before the first watch ended, he lay before us—dead!

By those of his countrymen who never knew him personally, and who knew comparatively little of his personal worth, he is naturally lamented as their great civic representative, their nation's head. Many, no doubt, in other lands, mourn for the Republic more than for the leader she has lost. They love America, the land which has led so many nations in the path to civil freedom. They mourn for her affliction, for the foul blot on her name, and for the reproach which fastens on free institutions, when beneath them such a crime can be born.

We share these thoughts of sorrow with all our fellow-countrymen and with the world. But O my friends! I am sure that I shall only borrow the thought which is in the hearts of you all when I say, that it is by none of these things that the deepest sorrow of this immediate community is stirred. You are his neighbors, his life-long acquaintances, his friends. I can read your hearts,—

and what I see there I myself knew him well enough to share. You mourn, it is true, your old political leader; you mourn the champion of your political convictions, the watchful advocate of your rights. In common with all the land, you mourn your President; and you feel the added shock of that foul and most untimely end. But I can see that in the hearts of his friends, and, in this community, even in the hearts of his political opponents, the deepest sorrow, after all, is at the loss of *the man*. It is the man that was so dear. He was the President.—Yes, but in him the man was greater than the President. His office was not so noble as himself. It is felt that in him the words of Jehovah through his prophet were again fulfilled:—“I will make a *man* more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir.”

There is no perfection on earth.—Let us not offend his modest heart by the extravagance of our eulogy.—But not many men have stood in the eye of the world who have approached more nearly our best ideals than he.

There needs *strength* to make a man. It was impossible not to admire in him the strength and fullness of his powers.

Even his stalwart, sturdy frame, his countenance

so full of healthful, cheerful life, prepared your hearts to trust him. You cannot picture to yourselves to-day without a feeling of delighted pride, the vigorous youth striding with his axe into the midst of the forest, rejoicing in his toil; or the man, at Chicamauga, mounting with iron limbs, after the long hours of battle, for that daring ride which was to turn disaster into victory.

And great strength of intellect was his. It was exhibited in every field to which his thoughts were turned. His student years were filled with academic honors; he had possessed himself of all the treasures of the classics. His Bible knowledge was such as to fit him in the assemblies of religion for a teacher's place. He became an instructor, and immediately hundreds of students acknowledged the stimulus and guidance of his mind. In law, although he gave to that profession but a fraction of his strength, yet he won signal triumphs in the highest courts. He entered military life; at once his untiring study, his accuracy of judgment compelled him forward to a leader's place. There were crises when his counsels prevailed with men who had made a life-long study of the art of war. The voice of his fellow-citizens, the desire of the President, called him from the battle field to the halls of Congress,—scarcely thirty years of age. His advance

was constant; he became the acknowledged leader of the House. Through the profoundest, the most intricate problems of finance and government he saw and led the way. And, finally, through all his course he was able to sustain his convictions, and to win acceptance for them even from unwilling minds by an almost unequaled oratory.

These were his powers. In *strength* he was a man.

And these rich, full powers we admired the more because they were the results in large measure of his own right and steadfast will. His varied strength was not the endowment of birth, or the gift of genius. It is true, a healthful ancestry gave him that gift of his first vigorous life; but it was his own youthful temperance and life-long purity which kept unwasted an inheritance which thousands have suffered to lapse through indolence or have ruined by sin. It was his own years of willing, honest toil which built that sound and hardy frame which could bear the full broadside of life's assaults almost without a scar. And in a still higher sense it is true that his mental riches were due to his own steadfast will. Every progressive triumph, from his college honors to that great hour when, attempting to crown another, unconsciously he crowned himself as the nation's choice, was won by resolute and untiring work.

But, my friends, it is not resolution, it is not all the strength that nature can give or resolution can acquire which alone can make a man. This is not the strength that makes a man. There needs strength of *character*.

And character is not found in power: it is found in the use of power, in the ends chosen by the soul. It is found in the affections; and here not only strength, but beauty is born;—not in the affections as we sometimes use that word, meaning only the native impulses and spontaneous play of our emotions and desires; but in the affections as controlled and guided and purified by the moral nature; taught to flow, like a full, life-giving river within its banks, within the bounds of duty and of truth: freely flowing, like the river which windeth at its own sweet will, but trained to find their will, with joy, in Heaven's pure law.

Powers far surpassing Garfield's the world has seen,—rarely, it is true, a group so varied and marked by such symmetry,—but powers far surpassing his the world has seen displayed, at least in solitary and special fields. Yes, it has seen them, and it has been filled with horror at their perversion. It has seen them used for evil, for the defence of wrong, or for the purposes of a selfish ambition. It has seen men in the very pride of their powers

forget the God by whom those powers were bestowed. It has heard the claim that genius could not be asked to bow to those moral laws given by God to common men. It has known men of rich and genial natures, endowed with warm imagination and with exuberance of sentiment and emotive life, to make the very fire and fullness of their affections a reason for leaving them untamed, and for casting off the laws of God. Thank God, it was not so with him we mourn to-day ! Full of warm and genial life, with a temperament ardent, companionable, quick to feel, and casting forth a charm on others which amounted to fascination, yet the strength of every feeling and every natural affection was governed by a strength nobler still. Open as he was—like all real men—to every appeal of a legitimate ambition, yet there was a force within him before which ambition was taught to bow. Exuberant, full-charged with every natural feeling which can enrich the heart, yet he yielded to no extravagance for which we must apologize to-day. There was no wildness in his life for which we must ask his great services to atone, no wickedness which we must drape with softer names, or ask you, with backward steps, to cover in silence at his grave. A whole nation, a whole world of Christian hearts, give thanks to-day for his private

virtues,—his filial affection, his unbroken troth, his parental love. There is a legend, you know, that the house where Christ once dwelt, that holy home of Nazareth, was lifted by angels and borne to a far-off shrine, in the midst of royal Italy. There for centuries it has stood, admired and cherished, the centre of pious and thankful pilgrimage. My friends, it is no legend which awakens to-day our thanksgiving. Our hearts rejoice that the pure and holy home which that true man and that true woman made beneath the village trees, was, without a thought of theirs, lifted by the angels of God and set in the centre of a nation's gaze. Before its pure rays the wicked shall be struck with shame. The tempted shall look and feel the evil spell dissolve. Innumerable hearts shall be strengthened in every virtue and drawn nearer to God by thankful pilgrimage to that holy scene.

The private virtues of this good man to you were always known, but now his truth, his purity, his holy human loves, his lofty fear of God, and humble faith in Him, are read of all the world. And never did they shine more brightly before your eyes than in those last long weeks of doubt and suffering. That may be said of him which was said of England's noblest prince—still mourned by her widowed Queen.

"We know him now,

We see him as he moved,
 How modest, kindly, all-accomplished, wise,
 With what sublime repression of himself,
 And in what limits and how tenderly !
 Not making his high place the lawless perch
 Of winged ambitions, nor a vantage ground
 For pleasure, but through all this tract of years
 Wearing the white flower of a blameless life,
 Before a thousand peering littlenesses,
 In that fierce light which beats upon a throne
 And blackens every blot : for where is he
 Who dares foreshadow for an only son
 A lovelier life, a more unstained than his."

It was of course impossible but that, amidst the excitement of political strife, his integrity should be aspersed. Those calumnies were long since scattered to the wind ; they are answered indeed without a word by the comparative poverty in which he dies. A man to whom a thousand golden secrets are known, whose mere name would have brought him wealth in a single day, bequeaths to his family a modest house and one small farm. I listen with delight to his fearless offer to open every page of his life to the eye of his constituents. He rises at Warren, in the days when calumny was rife, meets every accusation with calm, good-tempered truth, and, at last, pausing before his vast auditory of friends and foes, invites them then and there to ask him any question whatever, touching any transaction in all his personal, financial affairs, which they may desire. He offers, and that without a moment's notice, and before the most exacting eyes, to account for every dollar then or ever in his

hands. We read in the history of France,—I borrow the suggestion from a gifted writer,—of Montaigne, the only one of the French nobility who through all the wars of the Fronde, kept his castle gates unbarred. “His personal character was a better defence than a regiment of horse.” It was so with this honest man. His integrity was his guard, and night and day his castle gates stood open wide.

And his tongue was as honest as his hand. Shall we ever forget the occasions when we have seen him all alone, face the unbroken surge of popular excitement or of deliberative wrong? Placing himself where misapprehension and defeat seemed inevitable, you have heard him claim one single hearing before the headlong vote; men have stopped and listened to his resolute and reasonable words, until, around this solitary advocate, as on a pivot of steel, the whole assemblage has swung at last to equity and righteousness. You have seen him hazard all his political fortune, and risk the trust of life-long friends in defence of men whom he had never seen, for whose defence he never expected, and never received a single dollar to his dying day—men against whom the rage of a whole State was aroused, whom a military court had already condemned, whose character was unspeakably odious in his own esteem, but who, he maintained, in opposition to friends and courts and

constituents, were not condemned in due course of law. He won his cause. The position he took in his argument was, by the Supreme Court of the United States, unanimously sustained, the foregoing trial declared unauthorized--the men liberated. The supremacy of civil over military law was asserted anew. The right of the most unworthy, of the most guilty man to be tried by a jury and before a lawful tribunal was anew established. Having fought without fear to save civil liberty from the violence of its foes, he now fought with a moral courage sublimer still to save it from the recklessness of its friends. One scarcely knows which shone brightest, the calm, sure wisdom of the lawyer, or the splendid independence of the man. What an answer, my fellow citizens, does this incident in President Garfield's own history give to those muttered threatenings of lawless vengeance on his assassin which we hear, and which seem to be tolerated, in some instances, even by sober-minded men! Garfield himself, could he speak, would rebuke every threat of this illegal violence, even against the infamous wretch whose hand struck him down. If such a thing could be, he would defend even that reptile with his own priceless life. He would plant himself across the threshold of the assassin's cell. He would face an excited soldiery and the maddened populace with that same

appeal which he employed in behalf of the conspirators of Indiana in 1864:— “Hang them if they are guilty; but hang them according to law. If you do it otherwise, you commit murder.”

But I recall your thoughts to the moral courage, the independence, the conscience, which this episode in his history—by many almost forgotten—displayed. It was the same throughout his career. He was not without great prudence; he was no stranger to a shrewd and careful policy; but he never sold his conscience for any price of place or favor or praise.—

“ He kept his honesty and truth,
His independent tongue and pen,
And moved, in manhood as in youth,
Pride of his fellow-men.

Strong sense, deep feeling, passions strong,
A hate of tyrant and of knave,
A love of right, a scorn of wrong,
Of coward and of slave.

A kind, true heart, a spirit high,
That could not fear, and would not bow,
Were written in his manly eye
And on his manly brow.

Praise to the *man!* a nation stands
Beside his coffin with wet eyes,—
Her strong, her beautiful, her good,—
As when a loved one dies.

And here, on this his funeral day,
Men stand his cold earth-couch around,
With the mute homage that we pay
To consecrated ground.

And consecrated ground it is,—
The last, the hallowed home of one,
Who lives upon all memories,
Though with the buried gone.”

This is not the place, it may be thought by some, certainly I have not now the time, to speak as fully as it deserves, of the immediate cause of the President's death. But what kind of religion or philosophy were that which could stand in the presence of a mourning universe and not ask for its *cause*? Who should fear to ask for it? Who should not fear rather to leave such a reasonable question unasked, or to leave it without a reply? In this case we have not far to seek. It has been already said with perfect truth: "It needs neither logic nor the lessons of history to connect the bloody deed with its cause. It was not left to reformers to discover it. Every civilized nation has taken notice of it. A morbid nature, a disappointed, impecunious, desperate office-seeker, one of the thousands of needy men whom a vicious administrative system first invites to the Capital and to the siege of every office where places go by favor, and then drives them half mad by its cruel and inevitable procrastinations and replies."— "It was the individual act of an undisciplined vagabond, driven to homicidal mania by a combination of uncontrollable greed of office and despair of gain." America will find that this cancer of place-hunting must be cut out or it will eat away her life. I am reminded of the words attributed to

President Lincoln but a few days before his death. Pointing out to a friend the crowd of office-seekers besieging his door, he said: "Now we have mastered the rebellion; but there you see something which in the course of time may become more dangerous to the Republic than the rebellion itself." How have his words been verified!

This doctrine of the spoils, after causing innumerable evils in the past—after disgracing us with official incompetency and corruption, working a frightful waste of the public revenues, degrading politics, impeding legislation—often thwarting it with indescribable impudence and selfishness—has at last completed its infamy by the murder of the President. And yet it lives, and is believed by many to be "an essential agency in our politics, which only doctrinaires and enthusiasts would attempt to overthrow."

I am aware that, in this case, it is said: the assassin was a half-crazed vagrant; why connect his deed with any system pursued by honorable and rational men? I reply: because the present system makes the President the target for just such vagabonds and fools. We may not be able by any human wisdom perfectly to protect our rulers. Even against Victoria the assassin's shot has more than once been fired; but we are bound

to eliminate every occasion of such deadly peril which we discover. We certainly should not endure a system which invited against Garfield's precious and beloved life the inevitable rage of a horde of worthless and desperate men. Oh think of the fine gold of such a manhood! Had the nation no need of that great brain and trusted heart; had we no nobler use for the leader God had given—that we must set him to distribute bread to a fierce and hungry mob, and then bid him open his bosom to the full brunt of their disappointment and despair?

But I gladly turn away from these distressing thoughts. I will borrow again from you, my hearers. I will take those thoughts of comfort which, even in your affliction, I see rising in your hearts.

Much as you hoped for from Garfield's life, you are already saying: What wonders have been wrought in the providence of God by his death! All dissensions cease: all sections of the land are blended in a common grief, and united together by these weeks of prayer and sorrow with a new and living bond. Since the first shot on Sumter our country has not been one until to-day. Garfield is dead, but our nationality is born anew beside his open grave. It is impossible for me to listen to the prayers which have risen from every city of the South during his

dreadful months of suffering, to see the Southern capitals and houses draped in black to-day, to hear from all those houses the tones of grief and sympathy, and not to feel that we are one,—that God has chosen the universal love for this good man to revive the long dormant feeling of our national brotherhood. By the universal admiration for his character, by sympathy with his heroic sufferings, and the great common sorrow for his death, He has sealed that brotherhood with a visible seal. Who can read without a thrill of thankfulness the words which have appeared in these last days in the journals of the South? Listen to the message from Alabama: “In these first hours of grief the fact stands out in glorious relief,—we are one. This morning, from the depth of their grief-stricken hearts, all Americans can thank God that there is no North, no South, no East, no West, but all are bound together in one common sorrow, binding in its vastness. We are one and inseparable.” And from Texas comes the same word: “North, South, East and West join in their grief over the grave of the dead President—a sure sign that the currents of our national life flow as strongly as they ever did in the history of the Union.” The press of New Orleans is heard: it traces to Garfield “the new life of the united nation—united not in

name but in truth." To all our lips there comes a response to that prayer which even Charleston utters by her public voice: "Those whom this national affliction has joined together, let no political differences put asunder!" It is a new day indeed when Southern men can pen such sentiments as these: "To each of us he was our President: to each of us he was our hero, and over the tragic spot of memory where he shall lie entombed, the magnolias of the South and the maples of the North shall mingle their shade forever." I do not believe that these utterances are merely the over-flowing of a sincere but transient emotion: there is too much evidence that they come from the depth of the heart.—How must the soul of Garfield rejoice to hear such words!

His power in life was vast, but his suffering and his death have crowned him with unexampled power. His name is made the vital bond of long dissevered States. Nations across the seas and in the farthest quarters of the globe, for his sake pour out new love upon his native land. The generous hearts of England mourn almost as if their own ruler had expired. The character of your beloved friend becomes in a day the possession of the world. How is he lifted up and glorified! His home-bred purity and truth, his open-hearted friendliness—reaching forth his hand to high and low alike for

a brother's grasp—and, above all, his profound religious faith, have become an example for mankind. Often were you instructed and inspired by his words, but now the sound maxims of his political career, the ample teachings of his political wisdom—that copious stream flowing full for successive years, the recorded convictions, the devout breathings of his spiritual life, have gone out into all the earth: they have become the heritage of mankind.

"His words are driven,
Like flower-seeds by the far winds sown.
Wher'er beneath the sky of heaven
The birds of fame have flown."

Every principle which he defended is endowed with new life by his death; every purpose which he cherished will be clothed with new sacredness by the memory of his patient sufferings, his untimely end.

We prayed that he might live. We say he died: we shall bury his dust. But his name, his character has risen, like the morning sun, with redoubled brightness on the land. It is a light which shall shine brighter and brighter to the perfect day.

"Take heart! The Waster builds again,—
A charmed life such goodness hath;
The tares may perish,— but the grain
Is not for death.

God works in all things; all obey
His first propulsion from the night:
Wake thou and watch!— the World is gray
With morning light!

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